





ast the street-side vegetable garden through a frosted glass shadow wall and steel gate are the first of many unexpected pleasures. The street front functions like a SoCal backyard, replete with pool. The order reversal wasn't what worried Ed and Joan Tomeo, recent NorCal transplants who took active roles in rebuilding this 1950s ranch home.

"The problem with a pool is that you're either in it or out of

it," laughs Joan, who worried more that it would dominate first impressions, and it troubled the Tomeos' landscape designer and contractor—Margie Grace of Grace Design Associates—adapting a house that had, until recently, been a vacation rental into a dramatic version of domestic bliss. If anything, however, the pool, grey blue and split between child-friendly shallows and a nice long lap lane, beckons you forward and, at the same time, competes for attention with a wealth of attractions. These include an 80-year-old dragon tree, planted by the home's original owners ("the only thing left untouched onsite," says Grace), and a turtle pond with a babbling high-tech fountain and water lilies that the rescued tortoises nibble.

The initial combination of elements is a metaphor for what consistently echoes throughout the home, the sense that you are suddenly transplanted from suburb to little wonderlands. Even the fence adds to the sense of escape from the merely familiar. It's enough to shelter sunbathers from prying eyes, but also keeps treetops and surrounding houses—the neighborhood sense of geographical place—in view.

"But this is why we bought the house," says Joan from her large glass doorway, pointing through the glass wall opposite the cliff to the Pacific beyond. "It's 165 feet of oceanfront, one of the largest residential coastlines in the city."

By then, we're through the kitchen, dining and family rooms, and standing on the back patio. "It's a pristine view," she says, proudly. "Look, no oil derricks." Indeed, it's straight blue to the islands. Platforms are far south and north and out of sight. "Whales hang out there for some reason," says Joan, pointing slightly west. "Way over in the corner, Ed can check the surf for his local break."

It was the piece of land that the Tomeos wanted, and you can see why immediately: perched above the ocean, the backyard a narrow strip with a patio and what construction manager Bryan Henson of Allen Associates calls "the coolest bocce court in town." It looks across a tiny arroyo before it falls off into the depths of the ocean. Even on a notorious Mesa foggy day, the view is commanding.

Although the landscape and site itself are spectacular, it's not like the house was an afterthought. Striking and comfortable throughout, the L-shaped one-story home is an expression of Ed's commitment to an energy-wise life and, for artistic Joan, an aesthetic opportunity realized. "Most of all, it's just a spectacular place," she says, standing in the kitchen. "Sometimes we think let's go out and









(Opposite) Ed and Joan Tomeo "[had] to buy" this oceanfront property. (This page, clockwise from top left) In front, redwood boxes host bush beans and tomatoes, with a frosted glass and steel wall offering seclusion. Red belly turtles inhabit a pond that shares space with a welcoming pool.



(Above) It's straight blue view to the islands from the backyard; merging the original living room, dining area and kitchen offered this view to an airy and light main room (below). (Right) A bocce ball court brings endless friendly competition to the bluff, with a sculpture by John Tyler nearby.



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eat and then we realize there are no restaurants with a view like this, so we get take out and bring it back here." She nods toward the Pacific.

The Tomeos grew up seven blocks from each other in the Philadelphia suburbs, but met at a University of Pennsylvania rugby party. Free beer, says a nursing school friend, drew Joan. Ed studied mechanical engineering; Joan was in nursing. After college, they moved around the east coast, and Ed's growing interest in energy and renewable sources drew them west, where his part in a management buyout made him CEO of Enpower Corporation in post-Enron California. They settled in Tahoe's Incline Village, but missed the seashore and began exploring south. One day, realtor Becky Kracke (Sotheby's International Realty) called. "She said, 'I have a property I want to show you on the water.' We saw it and we said, 'We're not prepared to buy it, but we have to buy it." They purchased the house from its original owners.

Ed is proud that they only made minimal changes to the existing ranch house's "footprint," extending the house out to the garage. They only went up into a space already enclosed near the garage, which became his office. Inverting a roofline over the kitchen not only helped create a gargantuan common living area-the beam over the inclining roof was the largest wooden beam ever brought to town by Hayward Lumber-but also created space for solar power panels coming soon, his deepest pride. "Before going solar, we had to be inspected," says Ed. "The inspectors found it was already 35% better than California energy standards."

Joan's pride is in the elements of design and decoration best seen in the four bedrooms, each with a distinctive, yet aesthetically cohesive bathroom. The kitchen features a glass abalone wall and a 900-pound glass prep counter.

"I consider the house itself to be the release of all my artistic juices," says Joan, who left personal touches everywhere, from flooring that is meant to suggest the







boardwalk on the Jersey shore to the selection of an outdoor sculpture by John Tyler. It went from ranch to vacation rental to something she likes to call "midcentury contemporary," which is, almost to say, modern postmodern.

Most amazing of all, Joan and Ed say, their marriage survived the year-and-a-half rebuild, and, according to everybody, their conscientious and considerate approach to neighbors and permitting agencies was almost completely smooth.

They had a lot of help, which they are happy to acknowledge (they mainly used local people and suppliers). Margie Grace felt that such problems as the pool ("It's such a large object, especially for something that isn't really useful.") were solved, well, gracefully. "It was a great combination of great site, great owners and budget." The biggest unexpected problem solved was draining water off the cliff per geologists' orders, but Grace left subtle jewel-like plants and a calming Zen-like influence everywhere you look.

Like her, construction manager Bryan Henson has nothing but praise for the hands-on couple. In fact, Henson, who helped improvise features like sculpture niches in a front hallway, feels his construction company learned business

(Above) The original hallway ran down the center of the house; moving it to the front offered greater views and more space. Numerous skylights illuminate the way. (Below, left-right) Redwood siding from the original home creates this quaint powder room, while the master bathroom boasts Ambra wave tile, Caesarstone countertops and Trader Thompson sinks.







(Counter clockwise from top) Subtle changes to the master bedroom include adding large sliding glass doors. Art by Dan Das Mann hangs in the corner. Ed can check the local surf before heading into the water. Buff Mexican beach pebbles and golden barrel cacti line the bocce court. The Tomeos enjoy escaping to "Joan's beach."



acumen lessons from Ed, and although the job took longer than expected—including a long wait for the impressive glass doors—it was, as he put it, "the funnest project we've ever done."

"If we had any philosophy building this house, it would be that we wanted the indoors to be integrated to the outdoors," says Joan. The outdoor shower off the west end of the master bedroom's glass and Ipé wood aesthetic sums up a lot of the virtues of the construction just like the front yard and the glass doors. Completely private, yet it feels integrated into the neighborhood weirdly, too.

Just before parting, Joan says, "Wait, I almost forgot,"

heading back to the cliff in a cor-

ner not far from the master bedroom where two Adirondack chairs looking out to sea nestle in a small patch of beach sand. "I call this Joan's beach," she says, proudly. "I like to come out here and read and drink coffee," she says, obviously wanting to get even closer to her view.

"We wanted to build a house that had a lot of places in it," explains Joan, back at the front door. She looks around satisfied and adds, "You know my mother said you should build a home where your children will want to visit," and gestures back through the gate at her home, full of visitable worlds just waiting to be discovered. \$\psi\$